

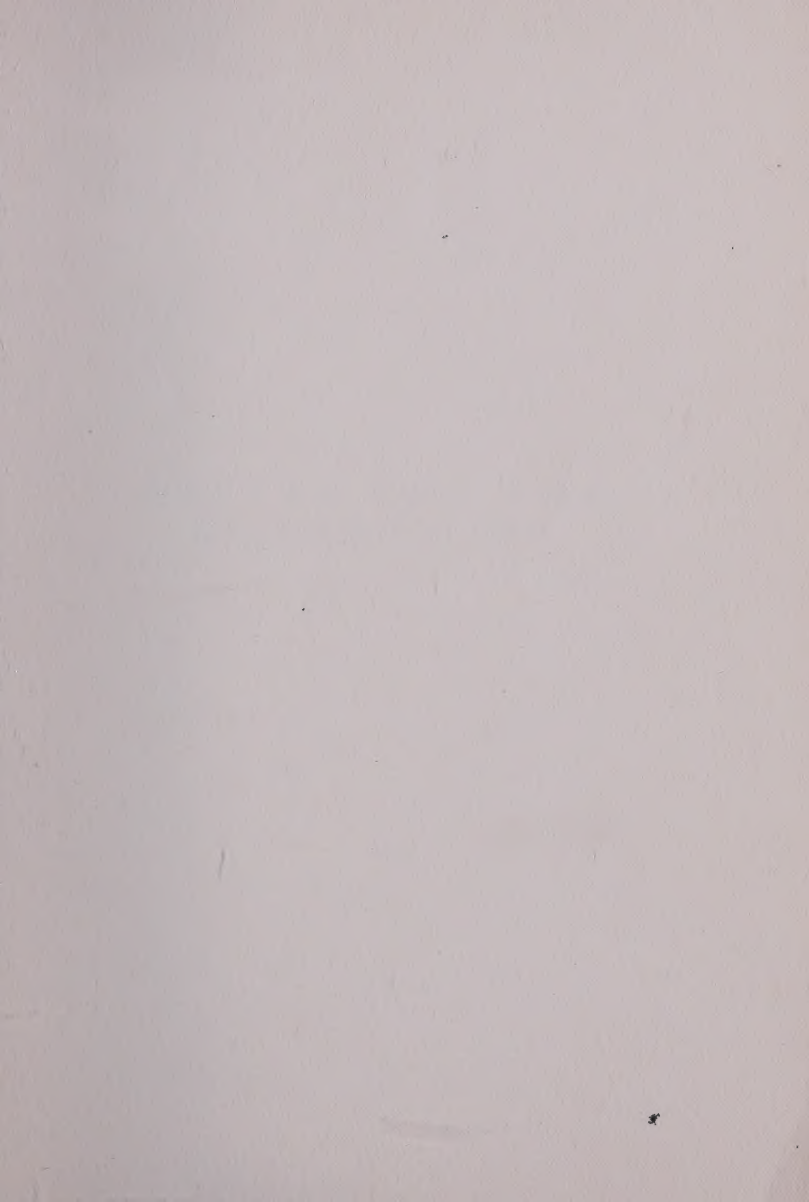
Easter and the Resurrection

IN VERSE



By JOEL SWARTZ

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EASTER AND THE
RESURRECTION

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By JOEL SWARTZ



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Easter Morn

Mighty Conqueror of the grave !
Lowly lay thy thorn-crowned head,
When, our ruined world to save,
Thou didst sleep among the dead.

But when flushed the morning skies,
Sealed-stone and guard gave way;
Thou our Light and Life didst rise,
Ushering in eternal day.

Hail, all hail, thou risen Lord !
Sin and Death and Hell are slain ;
Life and Hope and Peace restored,
Through thy resurrection reign.

He is Risen.

“He is risen !” This one word
Puts the foes of truth to rout,
Gives to Hope a living Lord,
And to Candor cure for doubt.

Fables now no more deceive ;
Vain are sophistries and lies ;
Thomas self bids us believe—
Both his protests and surprise.

From the angels at the tomb,
To the flames at Pentecost,
“He is risen !” breaks the gloom
In whose shadows all seemed lost.

Life and immortality,
On the resurrection morn,
With the new-made sabbath day,
Into clearest light were born.

“He is risen !” Let the sound
Ring through every age and clime,
Reaching earth’s remotest bound
And the farthest stretch of time !

“It was not possible that he should be holden of it.”
(Death.)

The stone is rolled away, the guard is fled,
The tomb is empty where the Saviour lay;
The Lord of life is risen from the dead—
Hear what the bright attendant angels say!

The faithful women first the tidings hear
Of what is still the gospel's sweetest word ;
And they are honored first the news to bear
By angels told about the risen Lord.

To women, lingering longest at the cross,—
To women, earliest at the open grave,—
Most constant and most faithful in their loss,
Came first the message which the angels gave;

“Go tell those mourning in the upper room—
To Peter, broken-hearted Peter, say,
The Lord of life hath left the conquered tomb,
His master and your own is risen to-day.”

To them, this morn, a new-made day was born,
A sun, new risen, chased the night away,
It issued in the resurrection morn,
And made the Easter day the sabbath day.

“Crucified, dead, and buried, he descended into hell,” &c.

“Ancient of Days!” Thou primal source of life—
For all that lives its being hath from thee—
With Death and Hades thou, in mortal strife,
Didst die to conquer and to set us free.

Down through the grave—O, wonderful to tell!—
Thou didst descend and as a Conqueror stand;
Returning thence, “The keys of Death and Hell”
Were borne as trophies in thy pierced hand.

And lo, thou livest now forevermore!
And as thou livest, we shall live through thee;
Let Heaven and earth thy glorious name adore,
As risen Lord, through all eternity!

“If Christ be not risen.”*

“Not risen!” then the stifled breath
Which utters that despairing word
Seems frozen on the lip of Death
Above the grave-stone of the Lord.

“Not risen!” then what means that life
Of holy sweetness, patience, love?
What means a world with passions rife?
What mean the peaceful heavens above?

“Not risen!” then the grave is all;
Naught then but darkness, death and gloom;
Faith, Hope, and Love, wrapt in a pall,
Sink in an all-engulfing tomb.

* From author's new volume of poems, p. 70.

But Christ IS risen from the dead ;
Death and Despair lie where he fell ;
He lives, our ever-living Head ;
He holds the keys of " Death and Hell " !

And we, because he ever lives,
Shall live and reign in life, for aye ;
This pledge his resurrection gives,
And makes all days an Easter day.

Nature symbolizing the resurrection.

Shall buried roots and seeds which SEEM to die,
From furrowed graves to life and beauty spring,
While man, decaying, in the grave shall lie,
As if he were some far inferior thing
To those low forms which rise to second birth,
While he sleeps on beneath the clods of earth?

And shall the worm its cerements cast aside,
Come forth to taste the Summer's myriad flowers,
And wing the fragrant meadows, far and wide,
With something of a new-made angel's powers,
But man, while countless ages roll away,
Be tenant of a prison house of clay?

Shall he who is great Nature's earthly Head,
And sways a scepter over all her realm,
Lie crushed beneath her cold, mechanic tread,

And robbed of his peculiar diadem,
Yield up his dust to spread a richer feast
To grazing herd or stalled and fattened beast?

No, no! he holds an animating hope
Which scorns the narrow boundary of the tomb;
Looks out and upward with a boundless scope,
And penetrating Death's portentous gloom,
He seizes with his clear, expectant eyes,
The prospect of a home beyond the skies.

Deep in the heart of Easter lilies lie
The lessons which his grateful eyes can read;
They teach him that he shall not WHOLLY die,
But dying, rise in beauty from the dead—
And breaking forth from Death's long Winter gloom,
Emerge to life and light beyond the tomb.

But now, whatever Nature-symbols teach,
In sweetest imperfection, faintly read,
His hands across the clustered lilies reach,
To touch the newly RISEN FROM THE DEAD.
And bowing where a doubting Thomas trod,
With him exclaims, "My Master, and my God!"

“How are the dead raised and with what bodies do they come?”

If death were simply what to sense it seems—
A rest from toil and pain, so quiet, deep,
That naught disturbs, not even lightest dreams,
That most profound, unbreathing, final sleep;

Our fancy might, without unnatural strain,
From what appears to sense, with ease presume
That to such sleeper life might come again,
And consciousness awake beyond the tomb.

And so we hear above our tears and sighs—
And coming through our nameless grief and pain,
“The sleeping dead in Jesus shall arise,
They shall return to life and love again :”

And so we hold with easy, child-like faith,
The sweet assurance of the holy Word,
That life will supersede the reign of death,
When comes in glory our ascended Lord,

That he will call his own and ours by name—
Will touch with his own hand their dream-
less eyes,
And their well-guarded, precious dust will claim
As his redeemed, for glory in the skies.

And then, the soul and body recombined,
But wholly free from any former stain,
Nay, rather both to perfectness refined,
Shall with their Lord in life eternal reign.

But O, how oft before our tears are dry,
Do carnal thoughts and evil doubtings come !
Cold Speculation dims Faith's glistening eye,
And horrid specters rise above the tomb.

She whispers, while we list, confused, amazed,
And trust grows paralyzed and lips are dumb,
"O, simple One ! how CAN the dead be raised ?
And with what bodies should the sleepers come?"

She asks, "Which one, then, of the lengthened list
Of bodies to the aged saint shall come ?
A series came and disappeared unmissed,
And each, in turn, hath been the spirit's home."

She asks again, by boldness made more wise,
"What of the atoms round the wide world blown ?
Of those which into richer harvests rise ?
Of those which into birds and beasts have grown ?

"Who shall these vagrant particles pursue
Through transmutations, endless in their range,
And give them back, and build them up anew
In primal structures, without loss or change ?"

Thus Speculation asks again to-day,
Her half-contemptuous questions, as of old ;
Nor hath our latest wisdom aught to say,
Except what she a thousand times hath told.

She cannot go beyond the faithful Word
In which the resurrection mystery lies ;
But pointing to her glorious, risen Lord,
She says, "HE ROSE, AND IN HIM WE
SHALL RISE.

"He is the 'first-fruit' of the harvest home ;
And he who in the risen Christ believes,
Shall in the final resurrection come,
Securely gathered in his golden sheaves.

"As sheaves, in Nature, feed upon the soil,
Drink draughts of sunshine, snowflakes, rain,
and dew ;
Work with the farmer in his daily toil,
As passive helpers all the seasons through ;

"And in their turn, the farmer's self they feed,
From wider realms than e'er his feet have trod,
And build, according to his daily need,
His body, fashioned by the power of God ;

"Then, cannot God, who first collected these
From Nature's almost infinite domain,
Regather them when scattered, if he please,
And build the vanished farmer's form again ?

“Those parts annihilation’s self defy ;
In their own right a deathless life they claim ;
Hence, in their combinations never die,
But are, through all their changes, still the same.

“The farmer knows his body as his OWN,
Unchanged by atoms as they come and go ;
As Susquehanna by its name is known,
Though changing every moment in its flow.

“And when he rises from the sleep of death,
In some fair resurrection home to shine,
He will, with his first rapturous, vital breath,
Declare ‘THIS BODY GLORIFIED IS MINE!’

“Why should we think it then incredible,
That Jesus Christ, our risen, living Head,
Should clothe with beauteous immortality,
The sleeping millions of the sainted dead?”

Enough for me ; I rest my faith in this,
That God hath said the dead in Christ shall rise;
Enough ; that I shall see him as he is,
Be like him and be with him in the skies.

"Begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of
Jesus Christ from the dead."

"Hope is the anchor of the soul,"

For storms there are, within, without,
We neither can their rage control,
Nor stay the force with which they roll,
In endless tumults round about.

And there are viewless tides of sin,
As restless as the storm-swept sea ;
They roll the hidden world within ;
We may not know whence they begin,
Nor know how swift and strong they be.

An anchor may not stay the storm,
Or change or turn aside its course ;
But it may save from loss or harm,
Or mitigate and change the form
Of evil threatened by its force.

Hope may not clear the lowering sky,
Or calm the roughly rolling sea,
But it may clear the pilot's eye,
And show the lighthouse flaming nigh,
And where the peaceful harbors be.

It may unfurl or drop the sail,
As sea and wind may indicate ;
May throw its fluke within the vale,
And sure the Rent-Rock cannot fail,
It may securely, calmly wait.

With more than telescopic scope,
It looks beyond the billows wild,
As only can a living hope,
Far up the ever-rising slope,
To its possessions, undefiled,

Reserved and kept for it in heaven,
Beyond the peril of the waves,
And shall, at last, to those be given,
Who, though by storm and tempest driven,
Drop anchor in the Rock that saves.

While though it rides the storms of earth,
It is a thing divinely born ;
It sprang to fullest, conscious birth,
And its transcendent, heavenly worth,
Upon the resurrection morn.

Hope, hence, with eyes of faith serene,
Made calm and sweet with holy love,
Beyond all clouds which intervene,
Looks at eternal things unseen,
And lives and reigns in realms above.

Benediction *

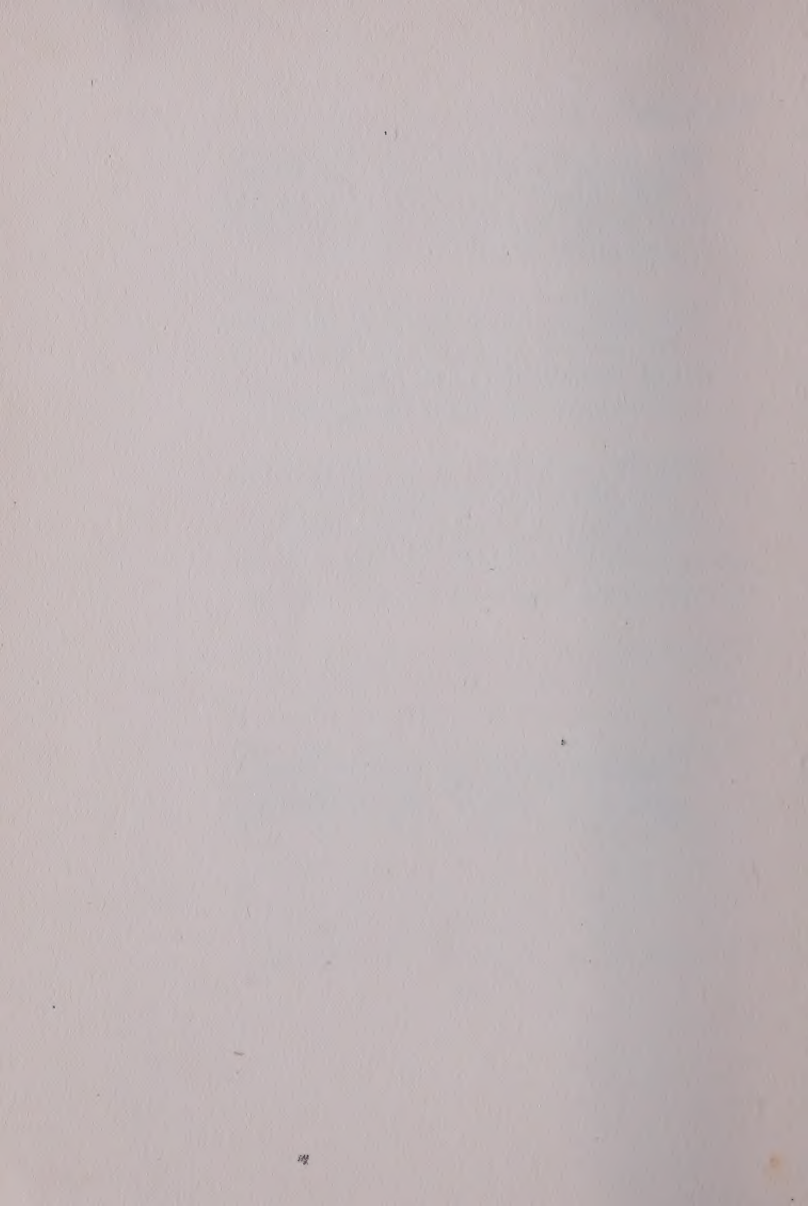
May that great Shepherd of the sheep,
Who brought our Lord to life again,
Your hearts and minds in comfort keep,
And by his Spirit in you reign,

And through the covenant of his blood,
His work of grace in you fulfill,
Until, established in all good,
You know and do his perfect will;

And thus until your wanderings cease,
May he your every step attend,
And bring you to his perfect peace,
In worlds and ages without end !

* From author's new volume of poems, p. 100.





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